

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
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**THE MILL WORKERS OF LOWELL
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
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MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

SOUTHEAST ASIAN PROJECT

**INFORMANT: NARIN SAO [CAMBODIA]
INTERVIEWER: SUZETTE JEFFERSON
DATE: MAY 17, 1986**

**J = JEFFERSON
N = NARIN**

Tape 86.22

Tape begins with Jefferson in mid-sentence:

J: ...your country, and tell me about your family and so on.

N: Okay. My name Narin Sao. I'm Cambodian. I come from Cambodia. It's part of the South East Asia. So I came here in the United States in 1981, March 1981. And the first, I first came in California, that Long Beach (unclear) that part of California, South, in the South of California State. And in California I went to school for two years. And I graduate from Long Beach (unclear) in 1983. And then the reason I moved up to Lynn, Mass., I have my brother who live in Boston. So we want to re-unify that our family supposed to be away from home, so we like to stay close. Then I move up to Boston in March 1984. I live in Boston just a month. I feel like, noisy, have traffic, so I don't like to stay, to live in Boston. And at that time I met my friend who live in Lowell. He came to visit me in Boston, that place I live on [Carol] Avenue in Brighton. And then he asked me, "Well if you don't want to stay in Boston, the big city, a lot of traffic." And I say, "Well why you move up over, move in Lowell. It's a kind of a little city than, smaller city than Boston." So then I [unclear]. Was looking around for a job first. Then I got a job down at the, first time I came in Lowell, I got a job as a counselor working for that Indo Chinese Refugee Foundation located on 79 High Street in Lowell. And fortunately the foundation funded by the state. And so the budget is enough by February, I think February 1985, that the funds end. So I'm lucky that time. So we have a subcontract with the office of employment training located on 89 Appleton Street. So then I got the

position as the job counselor. So I worked for the [unclear] about nine months, no, almost a year. The budget, I mean the proposal for my position is end too. So I spoke to my boss, I say, "Well I'll run away from Lowell if I could not have, I don't have a job." She say, "Well let me check with the employment office, the state employment, so maybe that they need the bilingual." Then she went there, about a month she gave me that. She say, "Well they have a position opening for that bilingual, like senior interviewer." Then I go down the State Employment Office located on 291 Summer Street, and we put a position, fill out all that paper and about a month later I got a call.

J: Lucky huh?

N: Lucky. So I went there to see the personnel office, we have an interview. And two weeks later I have a phone call say I can start it from September 1985. [Comment unclear].

J: So that's what you're doing now?

N: Yes, that's what I'm doing now.

J: So do you mind talking about your family back in Cambodia?

N: Oh okay.

J: Because they (--).

N: [Unclear]. It's already in the United States.

J: Right. We want to find out how you came here, because we're asking everybody. (N: Okay) Now you came because there was war going on in Cambodia, or why did you leave?

N: Let me tell you way back to 1970.

J: Yah.

N: After I was a student in [Royal?] University in Phnom Penh. So I studied about administration and economics in [Europe?] and my country too. In Cambodia, before 1970, it was the Royal Regime [unclear] Prince [Sihanouk?]. And that's why he lead the country. But like since 1960 up to 1970, no 1968, in his covenant they have corruption. So the people who have more knowledge, mostly they're people in school, they complain that in his administration. So we have a revolution one time, but not succeed. But in 1970 we have one [guy] who is a [unclear]. His name is General [Lon Nol], he's part of like the left side, not the right.

J: A leftist?

N: Yah. So beside me we have a lot of students and people, intelligent people support him. So we do that [coup de tat], (J: Umhm) and he get that Regime turn to be a Republic.

J: Was that scary doing that?

N: Oh yah! A lot of fighting; a lot of killing. See even in my facilities, in my university place, we have a lot of bomb and killing. So at the time we had time to make the coup de tat, because the Prince [Norodom Sihanouk], he left that country for visit in France. That's how we had time to do, to [unclear] that.

J: But you felt it was worth it to go through this?

N: Yes. So from 1970 Cambodia was a Republic Regime. So all people join, was very happy with that Regime.

J: Umhm.

N: But it's kind like you know, inside that the covenant. It is, I [can't or can] say that like a culture or attitude of Cambodian people. When someone to be on top of the, or like a leader of the country, it has some of the staff working around to make corruption or some. We can say the whole covenant is a bad people. Then the student and all the people who are nationalism is look at [unclear]. This Regime we had so far, then we had from that Royal Regime, we want a Regime look good, do the good thing to that country. Then people start to complain. They say that one [unclear] that Regime is [unclear] very straight and good to that country. So he complain. He didn't [unclear] for them. They try to lift, to go inside the forest to make [unclear]. But at the time the Prince [Sihanouk] he's outside the country. So he did the action to [unclear]. If the people don't want to support that Regime, come in the forest, make the [unclear] again that Republic Regime. But like I say that most educated people, we don't like that Communist Regime. We still try to advise that Mr. [Lon Nol], that General Lon Nol, who is the leader of the Republic Regime. But the Prince [Sihanouk] try to make action in the forest again, everyday, every time. So, and he have his partner Mr. (?) and Pol Pot, who that the person who came from Chinese Communist who have ideologies that [Marxist], or (--)

J: Right.

N: Yah. So he help [unclear]. He live in that forest and jungle, make guerilla fighting anytime. At that time we have (--)

J: So you're still going to school at this time?

N: Yes, I still go to school.

J: It must have been hard doing your studies?

N: That's right. In the every place, every city we have like the bell, what you call like the alarm for the friend, or the troop who fighting (J: right) to want to get inside the city. Even in Phnom Penh, the big Capital of Cambodia, sometime they have all bomb, or he (unclear) that inside that city. So Mr. Pol Pot, [Unclear] and Prince Sihanouk try to get at the Regime, try to get the Cambodia back. So at that time, after we have a small country, so we ask support from United States. At the time Mr. Kennedy and Nixon was the Vice President. So he provide some military aid. So at that time we have the war in South Vietnam. That's why he helped us some too, brought in Cambodia. So I don't know, I just heard that. At that time when we asked for that support for military aid from the United States. So Mr., is it Johnson or? (J: Umhm) Yah, he said, "Well, I think that he's not, the aid is not approved by the Congress," or (--)

J: Oh, so you didn't get the aid? (N: Yah) Oh because of Vietnam at that time?

N: So [unclear]. So he say, "Well why the South Vietnam?" He asked the (Senate?) to help the Cambodia to fight [unclear], because at that time the Communist Vietnam and the Communist Cambodian is a corporate. They tried to take the whole South East Asia. So (I think by) 1972, 73, no 73 that United States start to do activity like ah, the B52, bomb some of the countryside. (J: Umhm) Unfortunately the United States pull out of, (J: Out of Vietnam and South East Asia) yah. So Cambodia, we have no chance to stand (unclear). So we lost the country with a lot of feeling. So in that time I was in Phnom Penh. So I know that situation was (unclear). So my place where I live in Battambang, that the western of Cambodia, and my parents live in Battambang. So I say, "Well, I should go to, should go back to see my parents before that the war come. So I call up the airline to check if they have a flight back to Battambang. And they have one flight. They say, "Well we have one. If you want to go it costs," at the time money is like a paper. So he say, "About ten thousand if you want to go." I say, "Well! I don't want to stay." We have a lot of bombs, the gun fire inside the city, you know like terrorism. (J: Yah) Then I called my father. I say, "Could I go back?" He say, "Well come." Then I have to catch the flight to Battambang in 1975. I think in April 1975. Just three days after I get in Battambang, all I heard that in Phnom Penh, April 10 or 14, 1975 all the Communist troops get in and occupy the whole, (J: the whole city) whole city.

J: Oh, so you just got out in time?

N: Yah. And the last day, one day later, the all troops communist that occupy Battambang too. So they released and then they order. At that time I stayed in the city. So they came up, knocked the door, say, "Well all people have to release to the countryside." I say, "Why? This is my property, my home, my land." He say, "No, you have to go." They all [unclear] the gun you know? [Unclear]. Oh I forgot that. One day, no two days after I get to Battambang, and then at that day my father, he's the physical, army physical.

J: Oh he's a doctor?

N: Doctor, yah. So he say, well, because all people, all soldiers still believe that the Prince Norodom Sihanouk come back to make the country to be peace. So some of them they say, well if the Prince want to come, the war is gone and can leave (that's alright?). So my father come up to my mother and say well, today we have to go to be like honor to the Prince coming. And I have my uncle, he say, "No! He's pretend! If you go he's going to kill you. Don't go." But most of them believe that, even I myself, I say well, it might be that the country (--)

J: You wanted to believe the best of him?

N: Yah, you don't want to see that the people, Cambodian fighting with Cambodian. Even that if he have different ideologies, that is fine, because if he wants to lead the country differently, but to be a group for the country like, to be peaceful you know? (J: Umhm). So my father and his father, about seven people working in the hospital, the army. So he went one car to go. I don't know where he go, he didn't tell me. After he went about three hours, I got someone who live in the place that he went in, he come up, he say, "Well your father was killed." I say, "What happened?" My mother and everybody feel sad about him. So, I'm just kind of like a person who is strong. I'm not like, if something happen, I not feel like you know, emotion. (J: Umhm) I say, "Well I'm not believe. I have to go there and find out what happened, or who's alive or who's killed." So I went there, I saw by my eyes. There were seven people, my father and his father all killed by the gun.

J: Now your father even though he supported them, they killed them?

N: You know, that's why I say, "Why? He's got to support them, why kill him?" After I come back to tell all of my family, it make me feel very, feel like solemn for my father.

J: Grief.

N: And I say, but the Communists, that kind of person or the Regime don't want to keep the educated people. (Unclear) that educated people and [knowledge] people is hard for him to (J: change?) change or to live that (unclear) people like that. So you have to kill it, all students, doctors, lawyers, every people.

J: All your talented people, huh?

N: Yah. So after that, all the people had to [unclear] to the country, to live in the fields. They forced us to work hard, and by keep a little food like (?).

J: Now how many people were in your family? Your whole family went together?

N: Whole family.

J: How many people was that?

N: At that time I have five family, because my [unclear] had to kill. So we're ready to, we all both ready to leave the country.

J: Did you have grandparents with you too?

N: Ah, no. At that time I don't have grandparents, just my [unclear], and my sister and my brother. So we live with that Regime, with the hardship and working hard. [Comment unclear] So I lived there up to 1976. My mother and three of my sisters is died. They died by starvation and disease. You know, like we don't have the medicine, the food, we don't eat enough.

J: And you had to watch them?

N: So that disease like malnutrition. I think the most people die, is came like swollen, the body swollen. (J: Um) And after they die, the swelling is spreading [unclear] of cancer. And even that we be released to live on the countryside, I think that since I leave, I mean they release us from the country to countryside and my mother and sister, we can live together in one place. Let's see, at the time, I'm not married yet you know. So all the teenagers, they formed a group to put one group for teenager. The kids from five years old to (--)

J: So age groups were put together.

N: Yes. One group, the early people for one group. So husband and wife is separated, husband one group and wife one group.

J: But at night time could they be together?

N: No.

J: No?

N: Just in case that if they were get an [unclear], or permission from like (--) Because all groups have a, that the leader group. That person should be appointed by like a, they say that the Communist party like in that city or another we call like a corporation, (J: Oh, okay) yah like that. But all the persons they just came from the school who they teach like a Communist idea [unclear]. So he want to go over. "Can I go to see my wife, my kid because he's sick?" He says, "No! He live over there, he have somebody take care. He have a doctor or a nurse take care. You don't want to see them." [Unclear], see? So sometime I don't know when my sister dies. We just work. (Full sentence unclear).

J: That must have made you so angry?

N: That's right, but we can't show that we are angry about that. We just work. Back to work. See that (--)

J: Was there any of them that were nice, or were they all that way?

N: All of them.

J: Didn't they have families of their own? They couldn't have any feeling with you about what you (--)

N: They had their own family, but they did not live like with us. They had one group for that like their own people. So they live good. They live just like the person who order, who want us to work hard. And he's different from us. He have just enough food to eat, but for us food have to measure by, see we have a big spoon like that. Say well the person eat three spoons, (unclear). So who say that, "Well, I'm not eat." "I'm hungry, I want to go to work. He's going to get killed right after he said it.

J: Hm. So they just didn't have any feelings towards you even though they had families of their own. They couldn't relate to you?

N: Yah, because you can think like that inside, but you can't say well, [unclear], "You guys stay with your family, you eat enough food, you're not working hard like us." After you say it you get killed tonight, or right there in front. And he say that this guy is spy. (J: Oh) See, so.

J: Now were all the people who were being treated like this, your people, were they all the educated people or was it a mixture?

N: Mixture.

J: So it wasn't just because they were educated?

N: But see, [unclear] I have to pretend it.

J: You pretended that you weren't (--)

N: You say well, this guy, "What your occupation before?" You say, "Well I'm a student," or lawyer, or medicine student, something like that." He say, "Fine. We're going to send you to see to work in the place like a lawyer or like a teacher." But he's going to send to someplace going to kill. They want to put the person who educate people, or (--).

J: So you had to pretend you weren't educated?

N: And I know that most of the people in my corporation of my team, a couple of people, we just say (--) Even sometime I don't feel like my partner who working with me is ever a man. I mean, I'm not trust anybody. But sometimes guys say well, this person is a student, or he's a teacher, or he's a soldier in that big configuration or [Utenen] or [Coronor]. [Unclear] got killed. So we all had to pretend if you want to be alive, to stay. I was just thinking about, we should have one revolution again back there. But some of them, we don't like it. We working hard. We don't eat, we don't have food to eat enough.

J: So you're not strong enough?

N: So our health is go down. Is crying, is tired. The mind is not function good enough. But I'm very proud of myself. At that time you know I, even the person like I like to thinking, to see that the situation of the country, I want to, my country to be back to like, like United States you know. Have food for people. I like to see the kids go back to school. All kid, they taught them in the field, dig the ground, sometime plant something, send them to [unclear] on an animal field, you know. (J: Umhm) So what does he want the country to be like, like that? But I guess that [unclear]. Then in 1979, on a part of eastern we have activity, people revolt again. So one part of [east] inside the military of the Communist Regime revolt. So one part [eastern] come and found again the Phom Penh Regime. So I heard, even we don't have a small radio or TV, can't read, or even book, or something to read or listen. No, just go to work, and come back, sleep. Get up in early in the morning, work until ten or eleven in midnight. (J: Wow!) So seven days a week. I think that we can sleep only about five hour or, five at least or six hours. So the rice [level] up to good work. [Chuckles] Since 1974, I have a revolution in the Vietnam, Communist Vietnam. Because the Communist in Cambodia, that Communist support by Chinese. So the Vietnam and Chinese is fighting. Fight against Vietnam and Chinese. So he have a time, like inside the country of Cambodia, he have for fighting activities. He take time to support it, the Communist, the one army and the one party who fight that Phnom Penh Regime. So all troop enemies and Communist not like right now, the Regime right now. In Vietnam he can (--)

SIDE I ENDS

SIDE II BEGINS

N: So people take time at the fighting between Pohl Pot Regime and Vietnamese. And in 1979, I think that, let's see what one, I forget. So at that time I take the time to escape. So we move and I, before in 1970, '74, we have our seven people in my family. So my Mom is died. So my sisters (--) I still meet two brothers and I saw, and then I ask where we should go, the direction to north, no, not to north, to west. West is the part of like Thailand. So I get two brothers and came back to see my home that I live for in [Bon Quam] City. So we went there, we didn't see that house, my home like before. Just the, just only that plain ground.

J: Oh, the house was gone?

N: It's gone. They all destroyed. So I say, "Well, where we going to stay? We don't have a house." I see just the place I use to play. So then we decide, well why don't we wait for, before I have my own sister. She got married with that guy who, well (Utenen?) and her husband got killed too in 1977. So I stayed in the city, [Bon Quam] City for one. Then my sister, my own sister, she brought my niece and my nephew too, and then she show me this [unclear], I say well that's fine. Now we decide to leave our place to find a place to live our life. So I ask my sister, "What?" So she, "Do you want to go with me?" She say, "Fine." Now I want to go. Then I meet my younger sister, so all together we have five, brother and sister, and my two niece and nephew. So then we decide to escape. At that time Vietnamese and when some people want to go out they have to ask for identification or the paper. Why you want to go there? And on the way I go there, I came to the [unclear]. I say, "Well I want to go live with my grandfather, or my aunt who live right close in distance," you know? He say, "Fine." Then I live in, we call that Sisophon, is about I think maybe count by mile, let's say from Lowell to Boston. (J: Oh, ok) Yah, it's close, but we, just by walk. So it seems so, so far, too far for us. Then I say "Well if we go together who's going to not get caught by that army or Vietnamese?" And I told my sister, I say "Well why you let I and my young brother, we just through first and then find out a way to go to the water." And at that time, most people, some do the business like smuggling. Bought some stuff from Thailand to sell in this country, and we don't have money to do that. This is my piece of gold, or like bracelet, or nickel. My sister, my young sister, she have a bracelet. So we cut that. I say "Well can I have a piece of gold too, my brother too, maybe to find out a way to get there and to buy some stuff, food, clothes and whenever I can make." Then my sister cut [unclear]. [Unclear] I think that's the [unclear]. [It become my, with my arm like this], you know? So tonight we decide. I ask, because I know that my neighbor who just ... We don't have a house like the regular [unclear]. It has to be a cabin or small, small, like put a tent or something like that. (J: Umhm) And then said, I asked one guy, he use to go back from the boarder to buy some merchandise and stuff to sell, I say, "Can I go with you?" He said, "Do you know how to walk a long way?" I say, "Well I never, but I try." He say, "Do you have bicycle?" I say, "No I don't have. Can I carry my (--)" Most people carry all the stuff in the boat from the bike on the tie. Just put in the big like bag, plastic like that. Okay. So tomorrow we have to get up early. I say, "What time?" "Four in the morning." I have to pick up all the rice and food for the long, along the road, you know. Then I get picked up early, we get up early at four. Four o'clock in the morning you can see [unclear] in Cambodia. So we [unclear]. So about I think more than ten people walked along the road. And if we say that, "Well this road we have a soldier, keep an eye. There's a guard down there." So we'll be, tell you "Detour from there." So we walked in the jungle two weeks.

J: Did you have enough food to eat?

N: Well we just, you know like rice and you put that, the cooked rice and some you can cook along the road. But you have to keep at night to be careful. We don't want to smoke or...

J: To be seen, yah.

N: Yah to be seen for when that soldier come. So I'm very happy. I'm glad to see the boarder and so that small market inside near the jungle. Because in boarder, in Thailand usually the Thai soldier keep patrol along the water too, cause he heard that the Communist Vietnam is going to fight or get inside. So he (unclear). So we stay there. We have a good person who know about the situation of geographic in the jungle. He's very good. He says, "Well we have to stay just for awhile. Let me go and find out who the soldier stay, where he is," you know? And they come back. "Okay, clear situation. We can go." And the guy who came here to buy some stuff, we have to say, make appointment with the seller from the Thailand people. Oh, this is my wife (name sounds like Sekonya).

J: Hi!

N: So I'm like a person who never have, who's never see the cake or the food, you know? We missed it for a long time. I told my brother, I say "Well, we don't need to buy anything for like to do the business (unclear). Now just buy some stuff for eat. (Unclear) Oh, a lot of [unclear] they have like the seller who bought the gold and we change the money to get money to buy them all the rice and cake. So I changed the money. I say, "Well I don't want to buy, just buy the food to eat." So it's kind of like the person so hungry you know? Four years ago I don't eat the cake. Never see the cake. Never see the meat or chicken. We eat about just a little piece. One chicken for the group of twenty, or thirty people. When they make a dessert, a rice dessert or something like that, let's say a big pot like this. How many people? Fifty people, and they measure by spoon. So we have about I think three spoons or two spoons. So make like you eat nothing. That's why it make my stomach feel hungry when I saw this cake at the time. So now he's feel like alright. Then I go back to get my sister and my brother. [Unclear comment]. At that time we have some people form together to, they have a gun and want to fight back. So those people, they keep the people, they keep the [fort?] that the Regime people don't want get in [unclear]. Or they want some force to help them to fight. If they let that the people come in Thailand, they don't want, like most of them come here, you know? They want to stay there. But I think that I myself, doesn't mean that I (--) Well I don't want to fight at all. I, that's not, I mean, like we left the country forever. No, that's not a good idea. But we see that inside or along the boarder even we have, form a group fighting back again, for again the Vietnamese or the Communist like right now. But you know like I told you concerning them before, that if he, all the group start, help corruption, killing, so they don't have like [unclear] or law to guide that group, you know? Just people who care for the idea to revenge. He lost their family, he say, "Well I have to kill them back. I don't want to go somewhere. Get the gun to go back to kill." So just have the idea like that. So I don't want to stay with people like that. Excuse me, do you want some coffee?

J: Oh no, I'm fine thank you.

N: So, the first time I stayed in the boarder, I feel like, say, well, I have to revenge because I lost my family. My father was killed, but we all feel like that. I suppose to do

like those people. I stayed there about a month, before I decided to get inside the Thailand. And so they kill, but it's over, this guy he has more money, more gold, kill [unclear]. Who protect that [unclear] people? They kill anybody they think that, this guy has money. So they don't have the rule or the law to protect people. So I say, "Well, I don't want to stay." Tell my brothers and sisters, "Well keep clean, go ahead." So I, at the time we have like, from like, what do they call that? Agency, volunteer agency.

J: Red Cross?

N: Red Cross. (J: Or something like that) Yah, they came because they heard that most refugee escape. They don't have food. So they came to give some food. So I asked them, I say, "Well, I'm trying to go to..." Because at that time they set up camp inside, it's not inside, it's along the boarder, but inside the Thailand. She said, "Fine." And then they took some people who wanted to get and get to, in a camp, because in the camp they have food, they have medication (unclear) to take care of people. And I say, "Well, I have my young brother, my nephew and my niece, they all want their education." So in the camp they provide the school. So then we decide to live in the camp in December 1979. I live in the camp about a year.

J: With your family?

N: Yes. So my brother, my sister, my niece. So together seven people. We live with enough food. It's not enough like here, just better than (J: Than before) before. They give some rice, some dried fish, beans dry, sausage. Sometime we have, one family have two chickens, two cans of sardines, but we happy, we happy. We think it's better than the last time we lived in that bad Regime like that. So I never think I want to come to the United States, never thought in my mind.

J: No.

N: But one time (--)

J: Where did you think you were going to stay, in Thailand?

N: Yah, I'm going to stay in Thailand and then I'm going to ask if they let me go out of the camp, to go to school or just find a job.

J: And get started, yah.

N: Yah, we want to start the life in Thailand. But one time, I don't know what, that the agency they are to provide by the United Nations.

J: Oh, okay.

N: Yah, they have funds for refugees.

J: Oh, like UNESCO or (--)

N: Ah, (UNHER?) that they [unclear]. So he came and said, "Well, ask door by door because they build like a long, long house.

J: Oh like a barracks?

N: Yah barracks, yah. So one they go by door by door. I say, and they have the person asking information about your family before, or your occupation. You have a family who live in United States, in France, in Australia? I have a friend and my relative in France. My aunt, my cousin, because most of the people with education, after they finish in Cambodia want to like to take, to be an expertise on medical, or lawyer or something like that. Like my father, he got a medical degree from France.

J: Oh he went to France to get his medical degree?

N: Yah, because all that person before...

J: Yah, they were, the French were in South East Asia before, right?

N: That's right. So then I say, "So which country you want to go?" (Both laugh) "We have chance to go?" I say, "Well we don't know what he, what he's going to do for you." He said, "The government is going to go let you go as far." So we feel like ah! But I have my cousin, he's, but in my mother's side. He live (--) He came to live, no, to study in New York to be an engineer in electronic, or [unclear]. I now forget. And I told him, "Well I want to go to United States." And he ask, "Why?" Well, you know but I studied all French language and all school regime is kind of that's European you know, from France. So most of [unclear] use this French language. I say, "Well I want to like, you know, like I had an idea I want to see someplace different like I didn't even know before." So I say, "Well I want to go either one. If you can say well France, Government of France accept me to go, fine. If the Australian [unclear], if the guy accept my family to go, fine." So after they get information, I think that three months later, the one letter came. He say, "Well you got accepted to go to United States." So I say, "Well we feel good, you know, we feel happy to be in there." And then on March 1981, I'm the person that came first. My brother and sister, that's why we came different place.

J: Oh, you didn't all come together?

N: You know, the reason I came first, because I came with my friend. His family says, "Well, if you want to go, to come with me that's fine." And I say, "Well." That night before I left I asked my sister-in-law, I said, "Well should I go first before I (--) If I came first maybe I can get a job and make money and we can send some. And then she said, "Well, go first but don't forget us. (Both laugh) I say, "Well, I'll never forget."

So I leave for, no in 1981, by 1981 I came in Los Angeles. So I lived with my friend's family for one year.

J: So how did you find it when you first came? It must have been a shock? (Both laugh)

N: You know, the first day at the airport in Los Angeles I feel good. Like I couldn't believe that myself can (--)

J: That you were there.

N: Yah. And even at night, because they have, it be here night, in the daytime over there it's night. So I couldn't sleep good. So I'm always thinking about my brother and sister. (J: Um) But I'm lucky I'm living with nice people, because that family, his kids came to the United States in 1979. Some of them in 1970 go... no, yes 79, because some people inside the country in Cambodia try to escape. Because most people have a chance to escape to Thailand, most of them who live close to the Western, or close to the Thailand border. That's why they came in 1979, 78, at the time, hard time. They don't want to leave so they try to escape. But I think that you can say one of the people can escape, can stay alive, can come through to Thai. I think one hundred for one people came through. Because along the border they put the mine, many mine. So a lot of them, they lose half their body. So back to that I came in California.

J: And the culture, did the culture seem very strange to you?

N: Yes, yes. So even the food.

J: The food? But what bothered you the most? Not bothered, but I mean what was so different to you, that took you a long time to get use to?

N: You mean food or just culture?

J: No, anything?

N: Anything. Well I have to tell you that it depends on that family who used to live in the city before in Cambodia. If the people who lived the country side out of the big city, so even they never used the refrigerator, gas stove, TV set, telephone set.

J: Oh, they didn't have that?

N: Never used the bathroom. That's why you probably heard about that. They have orientation camp in Thailand.

J: Oh, to get people use to what to expect?

N: In Philippines, Indonesia, that's why they try to orientate them before they came. But I don't think I have any problem like that. It's fast for me to adapt to this culture, because I left my parents in 1973, no '70, I left my parents to come to study in Phnom Penh. But the most different for me like ah, before I came here I'm not married. I just got married in California. So I use to go to school, full-time student. So I don't have time to go to buy like Asian food, or rice. So I have to take a hamburger or meatloaf, that kind of American food. So I just used to eat like my (last meal). (Both laugh) So in 1983 I get married.

J: Now your wife came from Cambodia also? She escaped too?

N: Yes, she escaped, but she came in the United States, in 19 I think in 81, but a different month, September 1981.

J: So you met in Los Angeles?

N: Yes, Long Beach.

J: Did you know each other before that?

N: No. I know her family by my cousin. After I came to the United States two, or one year, my cousin (says name?), she came in Thailand and she wrote a letter to me. Say well, can you take me to the United States or sponsor me to United States? I say, "Well, hold on. Let me go to ask somebody or to do the paper there." Then I get paper to do that, like special sheet or affidavit and send to her, and send that to the United States Embassy located in Bangkok and ask them. They say, "Well, that's alright." So they came here to live in Long Beach. So she used to live with my wife's family in the camp orientation, in Philippines. (J: Oh!) So that's why she know her first. After I got her to live in Long Beach and she told me that, "Well I have friend who use to live in the Philippine camp with me." And she told me she lived in Long Beach too. I say, "What's her name?" And she got the name and the telephone number and I call. And one day we go to visit my wife's family. So we got to know each other and about a year later I got married.

J: Did you have a traditional ceremony when you got married?

N: Yes. We do like, (rest of sentence unclear).

J: For your religion?

N: Yah. I have an album of that if you want to...

J: Oh! Could I see it?

N: [Calls out to "Panya")! Take that married album. So I used to keep all that documentation. So my wife and I get married and I still go to school. I have a part-time as library assistant.

J: Busy huh? [Laughs]

N: Yes. And then I received a letter saying my brother and sister who in Thailand, they came to live in Indonesia. So he say, "Well, so how you like United States?" I say, "Well that's all right, but we still miss you all."

J: Yah.

N: So I send the money to them. [J: Looking at photos]. So I think 1981 to (--) I didn't remember what month he came to Boston. You can write to Boston, because she have one Agency USCC? Volunteer Agency sponsored by, [to take her].

J: To come to Boston?

N: Yah, to Boston. And I called her [unclear]. Say, "Well you want to live in California?" She say, "No." I say, "Why no?" "Because my sponsor she's nice person you know, generous, [gentle]." I say. "Fine," but I'm worried about here is the snow, cold you know?"

J: Yah (laughs). That's right. You're used to the warm weather.

N: So she said, "No, that's alright (rest of sentence unclear)." So I asked again to move here. So we still keep in touch. But later, around 1984, no 83, I came to visit her one time and asked her, "Well do you want to go (unclear)?" "Well, okay." So right now she moved to live in California. "I can't believe you."

J: Oh no!

N: But I still have my brother who right now, he still lives in Boston. He says, "Well." My brother asked me, "He says, well you want to go, you want to looking for a better job. In the area it's good for you if you want to come." Then I came to visit him. Then after that I decided to come. And we have two kids since we got married.

J: So how did you find (--) Have you found the people here welcome you pretty much? Or have you found any kind of (--) I know they've had some problems in Boston with discrimination.

N: That's right, that's right. Even I, the first, the first three months (--)

TAPE I ENDS

TAPE II, SIDE A BEGINS

J: So you found some discrimination right after you came?

N: Yah. When, I think that 1981, 82 in Long Beach, in the part of the western, a lot of black, the black people. So those people is jealous, or discrimination. (Both speak at same time, rest of sentence unclear).

J: Oh the black people were huh?

N: So they tried to mugging, get some like a watch or necklace from us.

J: And did that surprise you that that was happening here?

N: Yes. You know like the first three months I came I walk to school [unclear]. I feel like, same my country, nobody [unclear] stealing something. And at night I walk with my friend along the road around 9 a.m., not 9 a.m., 9 p.m. And along the road, about, say well one hundred or I think ten or fifteen feet from me, I saw four black people. I don't think that he just come to mugging or [unclear] me, you know? I think that maybe he stay out at night like people I met when I came to United States. I say, "Hi, hi sir." Then they jumped up to me and grabbed me and beat me down. And my friend, two guys beat him. So I tried to protect myself you know? So they keep me laying on that ground and get my watch. At that night I had twenty bucks in my pocket. He got it. And my book he throw away on that street. And I think that he scared, because he saw the one car drive up and then all of them run away. And then I got up, stand up and I feel like, (J: dizzy?) dizzy, yah. But my friend, he have very serious you know, bleeding. And I say, "Well what am I going to do?" I don't know how first [unclear]. I know I just studied [rest of sentence unclear]. I'm not far from the school. About I think that 1/2 mile from school. So I say "Well, I should go back to school, because they have the guard or police in the campus. So I run back, go there and report to police. And the police drove me up near the place happened. And he said, "Do you remember that guys face?" I say, "No I don't remember that. Just that so big and tall. That's it to know.

J: Did you have to go to the hospital to get treated?

N: Yah. So I see the doctor, and he give me some medicine.

J: So did that make you feel bad about the United States?

N: Yah. I say, "Well I feel bad. I don't want to stay. Is that the different?" That's what I thought when I was in Thailand. I say, "Well the United States, just a nice place, nice people." So I feel like if the United States and Thailand is look like Canada, I go back. So just not myself and my friend, we have somebody, that Asian people, who have meeting of stealing or mugging like that many, many times. So I feel well this place,

that's why I don't want to stay there. But my sister, she say, "Well, I like [unclear]." But my sister, she'd the Christian, because she used to go to church. Right now she's the kind like person who teach the bible for the Asian people.

J: So have you found that problem here in Boston like you did in Long Beach?

N: No, no.

J: Nobody has treated you like that?

N: I just heard that, I read all authorities say now, Revere, how they have more discrimination with people.

J: Oh in Revere?

N: Yah in Revere. And two by from Lowell have got killed by two guys.

J: Yah, but everybody's been pretty good here, huh?

N: Yah, I like this city.

J: You like it a lot?

N: Yah. You probably now heard about that we have been to celebrate the New Year.

J: Oh yah, at the University.

N: Yah, and this year in front of City Hall. So most people have welcome us to live here. And you probably heard that why (unclear) the refugee in Lowell. Right now we have number, I think 3,000 people, Cambodian, just Cambodian people. So about 500 families.

J: So that's nice so you can have all your people together.

N: Yah. So I think this place, this city, even that the people have problems, the big problem is the housing.

J: Hm, not finding good enough.

N: Yah, not good enough. Two bedroom cost \$400.00. So that's why you go someplace [unclear] for the Asian, for Cambodian, people live together three or two family.

J: Oh they do?

N: Yah. Cause he can't afford to find a place to live as say, one family.

J: They're very expensive huh?

N: Expensive. But we have a good opportunity here to find a job. It's easier for (--) Like I myself working there with that employer to place the Asians.

J: Now did you, you went to the University here? Or you just went to school in Long Beach?

N: I took (--) I went to (--) Last year I went to the University to take Administration and Sociology. But unfortunately we have a problem with financial family. I just bought a house so that's why (J: oh well) I couldn't afford it, maybe next year. I ask my wife, I say, "Well can I go to school?" I still enjoy the school. Though I understand that language not ah, is still broken right. [Laughs] So I want to go back. I want to refresh my knowledge in who I study, what I study in Cambodia.

J: Hm. Have you had any problem with (--) I've heard that some of the Spanish or Hispanic people are jealous of you people?

N: Sure, positively.

J: Really? Now how do they experience it? Like the kids in school experience that or problems because of that or (--)

N: Ah, I think that the parents or the school, or sometime they saw that you. They say, "Well Asian people drive new car, luxury car." I can say in here most Cambodian have many house, they own their house, property. Of course they come here, we come here, we working, but I don't talk about that people who just come and need to go to school, or their English skill, or and he have to learn more English before he go to find a job. So they have to need the service like welfare assistance just for the first he come, you know?

J: Just to get going.

N: Yah. I say, "That's fine." But we can say about, I think that about 15% or 20% of the population, the Cambodian population in Lowell. It's 25%. No it's not 25%. I think that 70% or 60% are employed.

J: Um that's good.

N: So one, say 5% for the elderly who cannot go to work. Even we have a place down on 79 High Street that is called the Cambodian Community. We provide the class for the ESL class. The elderly, they willing to learn English, but his mind couldn't.

J: That's hard after you've lived all of your life in.

N: Yah I know. That's right. But I always say that when we get at team together in the meeting, we just need to have a meeting to [unclear], explain, well we come to the United States. We know that this place is freedom for us. You have to go to school get more education, get job, and then we have the house, we have the place for your kid to run. Then you see that the kid go to school, you going to see your kid grow up. That's the best life in the United States. It's not just come, well I want to collect money. Just see, well I don't want to go somewhere else, I just stable. I just explain to them, say to them, you have to think back all way back when you was in the hard time what they did for you. So you have to think to make your mind. So I'm very proud of the people in Lowell, I'm talking about Lowell too. Most of us just feeling, well we come here, we away from home. We have to be a good person. People are really nice here. That's why you probably know that the Asian people are not people first making problems.

J: No, not at all.

N: Quiet people most of them, but we have some.

J: Well everybody does. That's true of any groups. There's always a few. So now your job that you have, what do you do on your job? You help the people get use to Lowell?

N: Yes. My job right now is as a senior interviewer. We work for the State Employment Office in Lowell, located on 291 Summer Street. So my job (doorbell rings) try to help find a job for people, but especially for the Asian people.

J: Because you can understand them. (N: Yah) Oh, so you have contact with all the companies in the area?

N: Yah. Then the first day I start to work there, we have a problem. You know that problem like speaking on the phone. (J: Right) So when I speak on the phone my accent intonation is, they say, employer say, "What? I'm sorry, I didn't understand what you say. What you mean?"

J: They didn't understand?

N: I say, "Well, let me speak slowly, explain clearly for you." I say, well, but now I got used to get to deal with the employer.

J: Uh huh. So it works out better now. Do you have to go over to the different companies?

N: No. Before I worked for that Indochinese Refugee Foundation and OET, Office of Employment Training, have to go, but in my recent job, just work in office. People come to register and then I do all the paper work. Like you take form and then I interview, ask information from applicant. So I have to get information from applicant, like personal

information, occupational information. This means his previous employment, his background, education background. The reason we ask that, we want to match what job we find him.

J: Oh with his skills if he has any.

N: So most Asian people, we have a hard time to find a job too much that experience, skill.

J: Have skills. Now where do most of them work? I mean is there any one employer in the area who's hiring a lot of the Cambodian or Asian people?

N: We have the most one in Billerica, no there are two. USCI and BSF, they're the place most Southeast Asian working there.

J: Now where's BSF? Is that, where's that, in Billerica?

N: Billerica, Bedford. USCI? You know that place who made medical supply like, you know like heart [unclear], some stuff for that. And USCI, oh no, BSF make tape recorder. Employer enjoy all the Southeast Asian workers. They are, most of them, they are a quiet worker, hard worker, honest, good attendance.

J: And they're happy just to be out of what they were.

N: Yes. On the product that they make, that he work, is more so that's why they enjoy it and they like to, "Well I like the Asian people work for us." And another point, you can say that the Southeast Asian should not ask for money more than (--) I say, "Well, I give you guys this job, but this job is to give to somebody." I say, "Well, if you pay me \$5.50 I'll start it." But Southeast Asian, "Well \$5.00, that's fine. If you give \$5.50, we are happy to do that." But I try to protect this kind you know. I say "Well, the guy you hired, white people, \$5.50, I don't understand it. We have the problem the skill, English, English speaking, but if you train them, they understand. Don't worry, well the guy's work is good, or make a good job, or come on time. You won't worry about him."

J: So do you think, do you think Native Americans don't appreciate what they have? I mean after having been through war and so forth and coming here, do you think people here don't realize how good they have it?

N: Is mean my own people or?

J: No, like my people. Do you think they don't realize how good it is here?

N: Yes, some people realize that we are the good people. You know, let me tell you that, when last year I worked for that Employment Office in Lowell and Employment Training, but we have sub-contract with the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association. So that I'm a job counselor, and the employer in Manchester, New Hampshire, they read article in the

paper, Lowell newspaper. They say well, the Southeast Asia have more reputation, they working hard, good worker. Then they call me. Say, "Well, I read on the newspaper that your people are good workers. Why can I do business with your people?" And then I call, make appointment to go see him, and say, "Well you talk about you want to hire Southeast Asians." I say, "Fine, but you know that people live in Lowell, and from your place it's far. If you guys provide transportation, one van, two van, we go try to work. I guarantee I can get five, ten people for you." He say, "Well I'll provide it." Then he try two van. So I get more than ten people, fifteen to work for them.

J: Wow!

N: Yah.

J: That's great huh?

N: In ah, I think that Granite State. [We cut.]

J: Oh yah, yah. I think I've heard of them. How old is the baby?

Background voice: Seven months.

J: I remember that stage. My children are older though. [Laughs]

N: Oh you have kids?

J: I have one that's eight and one that's ten.

N: They all girl or?

J: Girls.

N: Well I have one girl, not two.

J: We have two. Oh yah, they get really active.

N: So is there anything else you want to know?

J: I think that's about it! Can we look at your pictures?

N: Sure!

J: Why don't you show them to me.

N: This [happened] let's say when I, before I got married. The man, like I myself have to buy some [unclear] to give to the groom, groom or bride.

J: To give to the bride? She's the bride.

N: Yes, bride. This the bride family. So I have to get all this, my side, we have friends, relatives.

J: Now this is Long Beach?

N: Yes, Long Beach. So we all get in line and bring all stuff.

J: Um, looks good.

N: We can see that people bring [unclear] all food. So, just bring and walk to that, that house. So we all get in line. And in front of that we can get in [unclear]. So we have to wait for the priest, we had the priest, this priest, the priest from the side of the bride's family come. Well you guys can get in and put all the food on the floor and then we try to get in. And then we sit down. We have the bride family and groom family sit place to place.

J: Now you said the priest, what kind of priest? Is this Buddhist?

N: Yah, Buddhist, yah. So then the two families, the bride's (--) No, the priest is the person who speaks for them. And then he explain that, "Well we come today. We want to ask that your daughter, to be husband and wife." Then we exchange the ring. And I put the ring to my wife's finger so all of them, see that." [Looking at photos] Then we start to greeting, to show, well this the family of the bride, cousins, all that. So then we invite the Monk to come to blessing. So the bride and groom sit down and listen to the Monk.

J: [Looking at photos] Pretty.

N: We think that the celebration have a different type of the celebration in the wedding. So they just symbols, but we both have to do that. We have a barber come to the party. He the symbol that to the bride and groom to be happy, to be happiness. So all that family have to do, but just pretend, not the real cut. [Both laugh] And then we joy and we give that wish to the bride and groom, it be nice to be rich. Then in the evening we invite Monk. No, I think that in the noontime we invite the Monk come again to blessing and the priest have to give the advice to the groom and bride, to be honest, to be family [unclear] forever. And then you see that candle and that piece of metal stick in there. And they ask the family and friends to sit around the groom and bride. And then we pass the piece of metal and the candle around. I'm sorry, just two ladies. It means to say that we all want the bride and groom to be with each other forever, to be happiness, to be riches. That, well that's the culture. (J: Umhm) And then see this thing? (J: Umhm) That's the sword. Put the top on the pillow. And the priest, we have three candle light.

So the priest, after we [unclear] to return, then the priest hand together and ah, what is that? [Unclear]

J: Offers?

N: Yah. And then this sword, they put in front of the bride and groom. We have a short story about that. It's a long time ago. One guy named [Sou], he fall in love with the lady, one beautiful lady, beautiful girl. And another guy his name is, I think it's [unclear], two guys fall in love with one girl. So, but the girl just loved only one guy. So they have a fight. So the two guys come right at the time to [unclear]. And then that guy get the sword and kill another guy who loved that same girl. So that's why we have, some of us put that sword to be a remember for that story. (J: The symbol of the story) Symbol, yah. And this is my wife's family. And then we take picture of two families aside each other. Here, see that? [Unclear] different time, it means during the wedding this one is very special. No one, no couple can miss that, cannot miss that. This time we put the sword between the bride and groom and everybody, mother the both sides, friends of both sides come to put a string. You know, string? (J: Umhm) The string, it came from the wrist. And we tie around the wrist. We say well, and they give us some [unclear] both have to be, stay with the other forever; to be a good wife or good husband. They all come, everybody come. And then see there's a flower, the [unclear]. And then each person have to spray all the flower over head of the bride and groom. It means a good thing for us. See, look at on my head and my wife's, so all the flower.

J: (Laughs) Beautiful dress!

N: So we have fun. [Sentence unclear] So after the wedding, year later, we have one, my old one.

J: How old is your oldest?

N: Ah, I think two years now.

Background voice: Almost three years. One month left to go.

N: [Unclear] I'm not smoke, but people, well you got to smoke. [J: Laughs] [Sentence unclear]. At night we have a party. Some people come to join. [Still looking at photos].

J: Um, pretty.

N: [Speaks softly as he turns the pages of the photo album] The first time I met her, then each other say well, we want to get married sometime, someday. So I have to go to get somebody to go to ask her family. I say well, we're going to get, to ask your daughter to be my wife. So [unclear].

J: Sort of like an engagement?

N: Engagement, yes. So that's why we have the ring for engagement today, that day. That's why I'm all dressed up. Just like a person do [unclear.] This is the place in the party in the evening. [Both are still looking at photos]

J: Those are nice. Well you know, um, I'm going to stop this.

End of Interview